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Wilson, Woodrow

An address made by
Woodrow Wilson...

[Philadelphia]

[1913]

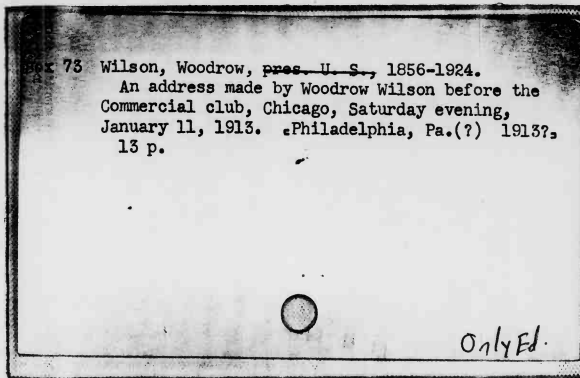
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Gift of the President

AN ADDRESS

Made by

Woodrow Wilson

Before the

Commercial Club, Chicago

Saturday Evening, January 11, 1913

Sent out with the Compliments of George H. Paine, Philadelphia, Pa.

26 March, 1920 - C.R.W.

AN ADDRESS

MADE BY WOODROW WILSON

Before the Commercial Club, Chicago, Saturday Evening, Jan. 11, 1913.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I look back with the greatest pleasure upon the frequent occasions when I have dined with this club. Indeed, I dare say that I have experienced more pleasure on former occasions than I am experiencing now, because it is more pleasant to tell men what they ought to do when none of the burden of it falls upon you than to tell them what ought to be done when so much of the burden is likely to centre upon yourself.

I remember the first visit that I paid to this club as a guest of one of your members, but not as a speaker. You were addressed by a certain Mr. Warner Miller, at one time a Senator of the State of New York, on the then proposed enterprise of cutting a canal through the Isthmus on the Nicaraguan route by private capital.

And I remember that he had spread behind him a map that was most ingeniously contrived to show that all routes of trade ran through Chicago. It was not a map merely of the United States; it was a map of the world, and I reflected, even in those immature years, how subtle the human mind is, and how apt it is to the processes of flattery. But I also noticed that you listened with respect but not with credulity, because I never heard that his enterprise was at all set forward by material assistance from Chicago. There were many gentlemen then as there are now, in the company, who were accustomed to the routes of trade in America, and knew where they ran.

I have been reflecting as I sat here to-night that it would be futile for me to pretend that the chief routes of thought ran through Chicago, but that I want to induce you, if I may, to travel, or, perhaps, I should say, to forecast some of the routes of thought which must be travelled in this country if we are to settle the problems that are now immediately confronting us. But I am not here to tell you to-night what I am going to do. I am not here to speak of the responsibilities which will fall upon me. I tell you frankly that, if I permitted my thought to dwell on the responsibilities which will soon be upon myself, I should be daunted in facing the future.

I come here to ask for your counsel and assistance, and to remind you of the responsibilities which lie upon you, as representa-

tives of the people in America. The business future of this country does not depend upon the Government of the United States. It depends upon the business men of the United States.

The Government cannot breed a temper in men; the Government cannot generate thought and purpose, and only the temper and the thought and the purpose of business men in America is going to determine what the future of business shall be.

There are many things to do which you can do without the assistance and also without the whip of the law, and the thing which is done only under the whip of the law is done imperfectly, reluctantly, sometimes sullenly, and never successfully.

The hope of America is in the changing attitude of the business men of this country toward the things which they have to handle in the future. If thought and temper had not changed the things could not have happened which have happened in recent months. For what you have witnessed within the last two months is not merely a political change, it is a change in the attitude and judgment of the American people. One of the reasons why there were not merely two parties contending for the supremacy at the recent election, one reason why the field of choice was varied and multiplied was that the old lines are breaking up where they are oldest, and that men are no longer to be catalogued, no longer to be found by dead reckoning, no longer to be put in classes as if their thinking had been concluded, and they were no longer casting abroad for the things which they should have and the things which they should do. America has come upon a new period of new thinking, and she is going to think her way out to a triumphant solution of her difficulties.

There are some perfectly clear lines that may be laid down. There are four sets of things which have to be done. In the first place, we have to husband and administer the common resources of this country for the common benefit.

Now, not all business men in this country have their thought to that object. They have devoted their thought very successfully to exploiting the resources of America, but very few business men have devoted their thought to husbanding the resources of America. And very few indeed have the attitude of those who administer a great trust in administering those natural resources. Until the business men of America make up their minds both to husband and to administer, as if for others as well as for their own profit,

the natural resources of this country, some of the questions ahead of us will be immensely difficult of solution.

Why is it that the Government of the United States up to this moment has not hit upon a consistent policy of conservation? It has not. You must be aware that a mere policy of reservation is not a policy of conservation. It is in one sense a policy of conservation, for it conserves; but no nation can merely keep out of use its resources in order that they may not be squandered and dissipated. We must devise some process of general use. And why have we not done so?

Why, if I am not very much mistaken, because the Government at Washington was tremendously suspicious of everybody who approached it for rights in the water powers and forest reserves and mineral reserves of the Western country which the Federal Government still controls. They looked with suspicion upon every applicant to use them. They cannot have looked with suspicion except because they believed that the men engaged in these great enterprises had not yet got the national point of view. If they believed that the business men of that sort were purposing to husband these resources and constitute themselves, as in some sense they are, trustees for future generations who need them as much as this generation needs them, there would have been no ground for suspicion. They would have felt a free hand in the matter of framing a policy which they could have pursued. So that when the Government at Washington undertakes in the future to develop a policy of this sort, the first thing it must know is the state of mind, the psychology, the purpose, the attitude of the man that it is dealing with.

That attitude must be declared, and open and transparent. Don't you see that is your responsibility, not mine? I shall sit there and try to preside over the matter, but I shall know what to do only as I can judge the men I am dealing with. The moment their purpose is declared to be for the general interest, then the whole atmosphere of suspicion will be dissipated, and the Government will come to a normal relation with the citizens of the United States.

Then there is another thing that is to be done. The raw materials obtainable in this country for every kind of manufacture and industry must be at the disposal of everybody in the United States upon the same terms. I do not mean that the Government

must determine upon what terms they must be available, but merely that they shall be available upon the same terms to whoever applies to use them or to purchase them; that there shall not be discrimination among those who are to have access to these resources.

That, it is true, is merely a part and a specification under what I have already been talking about. If those raw materials are to be used in the spirit of those who would serve the whole country only, without regard to section or individual, then our future is assured of an absence of the kind of discrimination which the whole temper of this country has sternly risen against. I want to take sternness out of this country. I want to see suspicion dissipated. I want to see the time brought about when the perfectly artificial condition now existing—when the rank and file of the citizens of the United States have a stern attitude toward the business men of the country—shall be absolutely done away with and forgotten.

Perfectly honest, upright, patriotic men whom any one of us could pick up are at a disadvantage now in America because business methods in general are not trusted by the people, taken as a whole. This is unjust to you; it is unjust to everybody with whom business deals and everybody whom business touches.

They do not believe in the United States—I mean the rank and file of our people—that men of every kind are upon an equality in their access to the resources of the country, any more than they believe that everybody is upon equal terms in their access to the justice of the country. It is believed—I am not stating whether it is true or not, for a belief is a fact, and the facts that we are dealing with now are beliefs more than anything else—it is believed in this country that a poor man has less chance to get justice administered to him than a rich man. God forbid that that should be generally true. But so long as this is believed, the belief constitutes a threatening fact.

I have been told by some gentlemen with whom I have dealt in politics—and I have dealt with some gentlemen rather intimately in politics—that I am not treating them fairly because I understand their motives and the general public does not understand their motives; and I consider myself privileged to say to them: "I cannot deal with you until you make the general public understand your motives, because their belief that you are not acting upon high motives is the fundamental, underlying, governing belief of the way they vote, and you have got to clear yourselves before the general Public."

Now that goes hard. It goes hard with my heart. There are men whom I have a very warm feeling for whom I cannot encourage to take an active part in affairs because the general public does not believe in them. I am trying to set before you the psychology of the situation. That is the hardest nut we have to crack.

There are business problems which it would be easy to deal with if the people were in the temper to deal with them, but they are not, and we must get them in the temper to deal with them, and that job is yours, not mine. You are conducting the business of the country. I am not.

There is a third thing which you must do which has not yet been done. You must put the credit of this country at the disposal of everybody upon equal terms. Now, I am not entering into an indictment against the banking methods of this country. The banking system of this country does not need to be indicted. It is convicted. I am not aware of having a single indictment in my thought against any class of my fellow-citizens; but there is reason to believe from things said under oath that there are inner circles and outer circles of credit in this country. There are regions of chilly exclusion, and there are regions of warm inclusion. You cannot get into the game in some instances unless you are upon certain terms with the gentlemen who are running the game.

Now, I want to hasten to say that I believe that some of these gentlemen who are running the game intend to run it fairly, but there are some gentlemen whom they know and some they do not know. There are some whom they recognize as entitled to come in and some whom they do not recognize as entitled to come in, and the future belongs to the men who are not yet recognized. This country is not going to grow rich in the future by the efforts of the men who have already got in. It is going to grow rich by the efforts of the men who have not yet got in. A truism, it is going to get rich by the efforts of future generations after this generation is gone.

Generations do not come on by sharp cleavage. One generation does not end to-day and another begin to-morrow. They are interlaced. The next generation is now struggling for a foothold, and the next generation finds it extremely difficult to get a foothold.

The credit of this country must be open upon equal terms, and with equal readiness upon the same terms to everybody, and the bankers of this country and the men who have the credits of this

country in their control must see to that first of all, before they can expect to enjoy the confidence of the country, and to have the problems peculiar to them settled without prejudice against them.

My dearest hope in my Administration is that prejudices may be dissolved and destroyed, the prejudices between sections, for example. The only advantage of having elected—I mean the only peculiar advantage of having elected—a man born in the South President of the United States is that men will realize that the South is a part of the Union, and that men born in the South are not in the least inclined to draw sectional differences in guiding the policy of the nation.

I am free to admit that a great many able men have come from the South, but that is by the largess of nature. You know the Englishman who was talking to the Scotchman who appeared inclined to contend that everybody who had ever amounted to much in English history was either Scotch or had a predominance of Scotch blood in him.

The Englishman presently in irritation said, "You will be claiming Shakespeare next." Weel, mon, he had intellect enough." And I am free to admit that I have met a great many men in the North who had intellect enough to be Southerners.

But quite apart from playfulness and jest, the happiest circumstance of my election is that I am the instrument, the innocent instrument of bringing about an end of the old feeling that the Southerner was not of the same political breed and purpose with the rest of American citizens. And I would like to hope that there would be associated with the death of that prejudice the death of many another prejudice, particularly these prejudices which are getting such a formidable hold among us as between class and class, between those who hold the resources of the country and those who use the resources of the country. They are more fatal by way of obstacles to the happy solution of questions of difficult policy, they are fatal to all others, and should be removed, and they can be removed only in one way—by having no substantial basis in fact.

If the credits of this country were upon equal terms to everybody, the impression would never have got abroad that they are not. The people of the United States do not have nightmares. They do not dream things that are not so. They do not come with deeply rooted convictions with no cause and provocation. And

then, in addition, and on top of all this, we must see to it that the business of the United States is set absolutely free of every feature of monopoly.

I notice you do not applaud that. I am somewhat disappointed, because unless you feel that way the thing is not going to happen, except by duress, the worst way in which to bring anything about, because there will be monopoly in this country until there are no important business men in this country who do not intend to bring it about. I know that when they are talking about that they say there is not anybody in the United States who ever intended to set up a monopoly. But I know there are some gentlemen who did deliberately go about to set up a monopoly. We know that they intended to do it, because they did it, and because they did it in a way which inevitably led to monopoly. We know it because they organized their business, or rather capitalized their business, in such a way that they could not endure if they were not out to set up a monopoly.

You cannot carry water against competition. I was accused the other day, and I am happy to plead guilty, of saying the same things after I was elected that I said before I was elected. Now, one of the things that I said most often during the campaign was this: "I don't care how big a particular business gets, provided it grows big in contact with sharp competition, and I know that a business based upon genuine capital, which has not a drop of water in it, can be conducted with greater efficiency and economy than a business that is loaded with water."

Just so soon as the gentlemen who carry water, some of them on both shoulders, are exposed to the competition of men of equal wit, who do not carry water, the thing is settled, and I am willing to abide by the results. If we can prevent monopoly and produce competition, wherever men are strong enough to set it up—I am not interested in setting men up in business, but I am interested in leaving the doors open, so that strong men at least can come in and set it up for themselves—and so soon as you produce that situation, then there will not be any necessity for Government to come in and take a hand in administering the business of the United States.

I, for my part, hope that the Government of the United States never shall take a hand in administering the business of a body of people who above all others in the world are prepared to take care of themselves, at least who used to be prepared to take care of them-

selves. They have been very much demoralized by the system of taxation which centres in the tariff.

I am alarmed at the number of business men that beat the world who are afraid to go out and take the weather in a country the richest in the world, the richest in resources, and I am fain to believe the richest in brains, who say:

For God's sake, don't take the cover from over our heads; don't expose us to competition with the wits and the resources of other countries which we have all along claimed to be our inferiors in both. But there was a time—and it is going to come back—when this country was able to take care of itself. It will be abundantly able to take care of itself when its energies are really realized and no man is afraid of anybody else; when every man has the same right to conduct an independent business that every other man has; when every man knows that the business community is open for him to enter and be welcome. Then there is going to come a season of prosperity in this country which it has never known or dreamed of, but not until then. You cannot have prosperity personally conducted.

You cannot have prosperity conducted by small circles of individuals. No body of men less than the whole manhood of the nation knows enough to be trustees for the rest. The only thing that makes society various and rich is that men whom we never heard of can come in at any time and put us on our mettle to beat them.

I glory in democracy for that alone, that it is a competition into which any man may enter, no matter what his antecedents, no matter what his training, no matter what his origin, no matter what his natural handicaps. The greatest pleasure of a college man is to see some awkward youngster, whose brain seems at first to run sluggish, come in among the smart set and put them to their mettle to beat him, not only at the use of his brain, but at the use of his muscle, the skill of his hand the adroitness of his address, his mastery in a company of cultivated men. That makes me proud when the men with a handicap win the race, and win it as if they had started at scratch.

So that what I have come to say to you to-night is this: Just as soon as you make up your minds that there shall be no monopoly in the United States there won't be any monopoly in the United States. It is a purpose, and laws have to be devised in order to head off wrong purposes more than they have to be devised to head

off wrong acts. Because, as I was just agreeing with one of my neighbors, since at this table there are gentlemen in the same profession which I am myself—I won't say which of my neighbors—one of the difficulties in politics is the shrewdness with which a certain sort of politician covers his tracks. You never know who his agent is; you never know whether you are dealing with him or somebody else. His approaches to you are so rounded and so various, and he is so absolutely sleepless and adroit in the way he does things. And as long as you are suspicious you are safe.

Well, now, that ought not to be the case with law. Law ought not to be based upon suspicion. Law ought to be based upon the premise that only the exceptional man is going to try to circumvent the law—I do not mean the exceptional man in ability, but the exceptional man in character. If only the crooks tried to circumvent the law in the United States, very much less law would be necessary. But there are some men who have permitted themselves to circumvent the law who are not crooks. The purpose is of the essence of the character of the nation.

Now, gentlemen, we are witnessing a new age. The nation has awakened. We have asked for and obtained a change of venue. We used to try every Governmental case before a selected jury, and the jury selected were always the same men. Now, we are trying it before the people of the United States, and the people of the United States are going to reach a true verdict. There is not going to be any disagreement in the jury; it is not going to be hung, and it is not going to stay out long. Just as soon as the facts are laid before it is going to come in with its judgment, and its judgment is going to be executed in the political action of the United States. That is what I mean by a change of venue. The jury is drawn from a wider panel, there are more things in the hat, and that jury is now of the temper of the people who witnessed the setting up of the institutions under which we have been so long free and so long happy.

I feel, and I believe that every one assisting with me feels in the atmosphere of this age the stimulation of that elder day in which men went about to set up a Government which was not intended to serve their private interests, but which was intended to serve mankind. Not merely to serve the people of America, for the view of that elder age was not confined to the 3,000,000 people then constituting a little fringe of civilization along the Atlantic shores. The

vision of those men was of the coming in of the nations across the waters to this haven of freedom and of emancipation. And they foresaw the day when men of every sort—and how their vision has been fulfilled—when men of every nation and every sort should seek the shores of America in order to take a free share in institutions intended not for the private benefit of any one, but for the elevation of the race as a whole.

Some of those gentlemen whose names we remember with such acclaim, who used to be in little neighborhood coteries down in the old dominion of Virginia, met in order to devise changes which were distinctly against the economic interests of Virginia, and they contrived then upon the principle that it was their duty to embark their fortunes and their honor in the enterprise of setting men everywhere free of every kind of trammel and restraint and unfairness.

Ah, that day has come back. Don't you feel it? Do you look at your business any longer within the four walls of your office? Don't you feel the thrill that comes to you from the rest of America? Don't you know that men everywhere are looking to you with confidence and with hope on the assurance that you are not waiting for the whip of the law, but that you also are Americans, that you also were born with that unconquerable spirit of aspiration which is the only distinction that ever belonged to the country that we love? America is not distinguished because she established a stable government—other countries have established stable governments—but because she established a government meant to be shot through with the hopes of humble men. The only glory of America is her spiritual glory, and when she takes down those ensigns of spiritual freedom she will have surrendered to the greed, the deposed spirit that has wrecked so many governments, that has disappointed so many parties, that has made it impossible to lift the race to the standards to which we all aspire. I believe that when I have the privilege of attacking some of the problems before me I shall, if I can, conceive them in the spirit of America, for you as well as for everybody else, for I believe you have begun.

I have no intimate knowledge of the processes of business. I never was engaged in business in my life. I must take counsel with the men who do understand business, and I dare not take counsel with them unless they intend the same things that I intend. I dare not. I am under bonds to the people of the United States. The

man who does not hold their interest dearer than his own I cannot admit into my counsel. I would be faithless if I did.

I have made promises which I regard as intimately involved with my essential honor. I can serve only one master, and no group of individuals can speak for my master. I am a trustee for the prosperity of the United States in council, and the council that is not common council, the council that does not include you is imperfect council, is council which will mislead. Won't you come in? Have you not come in? Is it not your purpose to reestablish economic freedom in the United States? Aren't we all in the same boat? Can't I enlist you to-night in the common enterprise? There is no bright prospect otherwise.

I have preached this thing for twenty-five years. I preached it during a great many years when no particular heed was paid to what I said. The only value I attach to my present position is that men will listen to me; that they will listen to me, whether they want to or not; that they have got to listen to me. And yet I am preaching the same thing that I preached as a boy; I purpose the same things that I purposed as a boy; I hope that the visions I had as a boy are about to be translated into facts, and that the great energies of the American people are about to be united in a thing which will set an example of emancipation from prejudice and constriction of every kind to the world. God grant it may be true!

I made this engagement before I was nominated. I have not accepted any invitation to speak since I was nominated. I came here to redeem a promise which I would not have made if I had known I was going to be nominated. And I would not have come here then if it had not occurred to me that I might now say that I do not deem myself at liberty to go around and indulge in the pleasures of dining unless I may say to men after I have dined exactly what I think, and express what I think in the terms of the general partnership of purpose and of honor which it seems to me we have now entered. The bonds are now signed. We are of the same race, that splendid American race into which has been drawn all the riches of a hundred bloods, and now as a united people we are going to redeem the ancient pledges of America.

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